



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin

Ryan Vaart

(202) 225-2539

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

OPEN HEARING ON U.S. FORCE POSTURE WITH

REGIONAL COMMANDERS

Today the committee continues its examination of the fiscal year 2001 defense budget request and the impact it will have on U.S. policy, strategy, and military operations in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region.

Joining us are three senior officers whose collective areas of responsibility literally circle the globe, stretching from the West coast of the United States across the Pacific Ocean to the North African shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the global population, and most of the world's trouble spots, are within our witnesses' areas of responsibility. These areas include China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, India, Pakistan and 62 other nations. Developments in these theaters significantly affect vital U.S. national security interests today and in the future.

Our witnesses today are:

- General Anthony C. Zinni, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Central Command;
- Admiral Dennis C. Blair, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command; and
- General Thomas A. Schwartz, Commander in Chief of U.S. Forces Korea.

Gentlemen, we welcome and thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to testify before the committee today.

Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, the United States faces significant challenges to its national security, many of which emanate from countries that fall within our witnesses' areas of responsibility. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to suggest that we are more secure now from threats originating in these theaters than we were last year. In fact, in a number of significant cases, I believe the security situation we face today is even graver.

Iraq continues to defy the international community and to develop weapons of mass destruction. Nearly a decade after the end of the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein is still in power and U.S. forces are still engaged in almost daily military confrontations in Iraqi skies. Our daily enforcement of the "no-fly" zones over Iraq continues to drain the readiness of our armed forces, without contributing to any change in Iraqi policy.

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Further east, North Korea continues to invest resources in developing ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, despite a combination of economic hardship and American diplomacy. North Korea's launch in August 1998 of a three-stage ballistic missile is an ominous indication of that nation's ability to pose a serious threat not only to our regional allies but also to the United States itself.

However, my most serious and far-reaching concern remains China. China has announced a significant increase in its military budget, opposed the deployment of any U.S. national missile defense system, engaged in dangerous proliferation activity involving weapons of mass destruction, purchased advanced military hardware from Russia, and threatened war over Taiwan. In short, China continues to act like anything but a "strategic partner" of the United States.

In the end, China is arguably the most difficult, and perhaps the most important, strategic challenge the United States faces in the coming century.

At the dawn of the 21st century, America is at a crossroads. Will we face our responsibilities as a world leader from a position of strength? Will we pay the price to ensure that our vital national interests are protected? I firmly believe that peace and freedom are not free, and that a strong America is the essential prerequisite for protecting our national security interests.

With this in mind, I hope our witnesses will comment frankly on whether they believe they have the resources necessary to carry out the missions they have been given and to protect America's friends, allies, and interests.

Gentlemen, before you begin, I would like to first recognize the committee's Ranking Democrat, Mr. Skelton, for any remarks he may wish to make.

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